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## **Cultures of Trust and Global Connections in Early Modernity. Remarks on Pacts and Agreements in Western and Central-Eastern European Texts**

*Thursday 18 September 2025 14:30 (1h 30m)*

Description of the panel:

The panel examines theories of conflict management in early modern Europe as strategies for establishing forms of fruitful connection. To this end, works addressing pacts and agreements are regarded as the expression of different 'cultures of trust' which result from the interplay of cultural, religious, social and political factors. In the 16th and 17th centuries, early modern authors could easily perceive themselves as part of rapidly changing social contexts: even within European states, the impact of foreign cultures and forces was undeniable. While reinterpreting ancient and medieval sources, early modern texts addressing the topic of agreements tried to respond to concerns of the present regarding contacts with diverse individuals and groups. By examining texts written in different areas of Europe, the papers analyze considerations about agreements, their definitions, the types of individuals involved in them, and the circumstances under which they can be broken. They focus on contacts between cultures, religions, and conflicting interests addressed through the concept of trust –often resulting in complex combinations of forms of inclusion and exclusion. The panel aims to encourage debate on the impact of global connections on European theories of social interaction, and on the features and shortcomings of European perspectives.

Chair: Matthias Roick, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Presenter: Lorenzo Fancello, University of Pisa

Title of the paper: Pierre Gassendi and Baruch Spinoza: The Advantages of Cooperation

The paper aims to explore how the structure of pacts described by Epicurus is reflected in some modern solutions to the problem of peaceful cooperation. Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) was the first to pave the way for those who followed. He worked to rescue Epicureanism from its historical accusations of impiety and atheism. In doing so, he formulated a theory of the origins of society based on the concept of utility and the advantages discovered through cooperation. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) pursued a similar line of thought. Observing that forms of cooperation could be found even among those he calls "savages", he deduced the primacy of social elements over political ones. To guarantee the benefits of cooperation, both Gassendi and Spinoza relied on explicit pacts and positive laws that bind individuals to publicly beneficial behaviours. Rather than seeking a shared moral or religious foundation, they focused on what is common for all human beings: the strain to improve their condition and the ability to calculate what is advantageous. What is now crucial for peace is not what is just, but what is useful, enabling people –from different geographical and cultural areas –to freely and peacefully cooperate despite their religious and cultural differences.

Presenter: Filippo Marchetti, University of Pisa

Title of the paper: Defending Utopia, or Which Political Theology Best Suits the Polis

The paper focuses on Nicholas Hill's *Philosophia Epicurea* (1601), a multifaceted work that includes reflections on the failed Catholic conspiracy that forced its author to leave England. The failure of the plot due to an informer led Hill to explore the reasons why his political theology wasn't enough to keep his fellow conspirators loyal. Philosophising about the conspiracy led him to believe that a human pact cannot be binding if it is not supported by an adequate political theology - thus placing fides among the most important theological and social virtues that should sustain the life of a community. As an atomist, Hill sees diversity as an essential feature of nature. For him, however, the commitment to the spread of good political theologies becomes a

guiding principle in the sphere of social relations. A critical analysis of Hill's remarks on English colonialism will highlight key aspects and shortcomings of his approach, which is often characterised by suspicion and an emphasis on cultural homogeneity. Hill's thoughts on the possibility of global connections will also be considered in the light of the connection he draws between human forms of loyalty or betrayal, the consideration of geographical spaces, and the construction of powerful ideologies.

Presenter: Luisa Brotto, University of Pisa

Title of the paper: Reaching Agreements in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Early Modern Trust-Based Strategies for Conflict Management

The paper aims to address trust-based theories of conflict management in 16th and 17th-century Polish-Lithuanian texts. Due to its political features (an elective form of government; laws granting forms of religious tolerance) and its borders (including the Habsburg Empire, Muscovy, and the Ottoman Empire), Poland-Lithuania faced challenges of multiculturalism. I argue that focusing on different ways of dealing with social trust may enable a better understanding of how conflicts with diverse interlocutors were addressed within the Polish-Lithuanian political discourse, with a focus on how potential conflicts could be transformed into other kinds of connection. To this end, I will analyze some passages from works on social and political theories, ranging from *De optimo senatore* by Wawrzyniec Goslicki (1568) to *Monita politico-moralia* by Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro (1664). I will especially focus on *Scholia on Aristotle's Rhetoric* by Andrzej Abrek (professor of eloquence at the Academy of Zamosc 1629-1656), where the illustration of classical rhetoric is accompanied by some exercises concerning present issues of foreign politics. Special attention will be given to the entanglement of local and international sources, and to the interplay of rules of rhetoric, legal concepts, and moral and political ideas when facing diverse individuals, groups, or states.

## Keywords

Trust, agreements, pacts, social and political discourse in early modern Europe, global perspectives

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## Short Biography

### Short bio of the presenters

**Lorenzo Fancello** is a PhD student in Political Philosophy at the University of Pisa (Unipi), under the supervision of Prof. Antonio Masala. He graduated from the University of Pisa in June 2023 with a thesis on the philosophy of Pierre Gassendi, his reformed Epicureanism, and its significant influence on the thought of Thomas Hobbes. In November 2023, he began his PhD, focusing on the reception of Epicureanism in modern political philosophy, particularly through the works of Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655). His research examines Epicurean themes in the political thought of 17th- and 18th-century philosophers, such as the concept of the social pact, personal advantage, self-love, critic of religion, and political hedonism (as observed, for example, in Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and David Hume). His interests also extend to Italian Enlightenment thinkers, including Cesare Beccaria and Pietro and Alessandro Verri, and their engagement with Epicurean and Lucretian themes in political and legal philosophy. He collaborates with the Chair of Political Philosophy at the University of Pisa. He has recently published the article *L'epicureismo di Cesare Beccaria (Il Politico, 2024)*, which examines the reception of Epicurean themes in Beccaria's *Of Crimes and Punishments*, and the chapter *Il doppio binario del gassendismo politico: Hobbes e Spinoza* (in *Epicureismo antico e moderno*, ed. by R. Cubeddu and F. Verde, Rome, Lithos, forthcoming), which investigates the influence of Gassendi's reformed Epicureanism on the political thought of Hobbes and Spinoza.

**Filippo Marchetti** is Post-Doctoral Research Assistant at the Department of Civilization and Form of Knowledge (University of Pisa), where he is currently working on the manuscript circulation of Giordano Bruno's works in Europe (XVIIth-XIXth centuries). He studied at the University of Pisa (M.A.) and at the Sapienza University of Rome (Ph.D., 2023). His doctoral research (*Natural religion and society in John Toland's thought*) was devoted to the relationship between English republican thought and the emergence of deism in John Toland's philosophy. In particular, he tried to clarify how the republican tradition (in particular, John Milton

and James Harrington) can explain the link between natural religion and civic religion. His research interests consist in the development of John Toland's philosophy and its relationship with other forms of knowledge (political thought, theology, philology) and thinkers (in particular Pierre Bayle, Giordano Bruno and John Milton), and the historical and philosophical culture of Alberto Radicati of Passeran.

**Luisa Brotto** is Junior Assistant Professor (RTDA) in History of Philosophy at the University of Pisa, where she is carrying out the research project RheTrust (Young Researchers SOE). The project investigates forms of conflict management and social education in Italian and Polish-Lithuanian early modern texts on rhetoric. She received her MA from the University of Pisa (2012) and her PhD in Philosophy from Scuola Normale Superiore (2018). She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Italian National Institute for Renaissance Studies (INSR) in 2019, and a NAWA Ulam Program - Seal of Excellence Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw) in 2021-2023. Her research interests include the history of the concept of trust (*fides*), theories of social inclusion in the early modern period, the history of Skepticism, theories of education, the political discourse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. She has edited and translated into Italian some articles from Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Pierre Bayle, Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Savonarola, ed. and transl. by L. Brotto, introduction by G. Paganini, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2017) and authored the monograph *Attraverso e oltre il limite. Sulla nozione di fides nell'opera di Giordano Bruno* (Milan, Mimesis 2023). She is also the author of articles and chapters on Leon Battista Alberti, Giordano Bruno, Pierre Charron, Pierre Bayle and on teaching at the Academy of Zamość. She is currently working on a monograph on the teaching of social concepts at the Academy of Zamość.

#### **Short bio of the chair**

**Matthias Roick** is currently postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for the History of Renaissance Knowledge of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. He works within the framework of Prof. Valentina Lepri's ERC project "From East to West, and Back Again: Student Travel and Transcultural Knowledge Production in Renaissance Europe (c. 1470 - c. 1620)". After his PhD in European history at the EUI in Florence, he worked at the University of Göttingen. From 2014 to 2021, he was an affiliated fellow of the Lichtenberg Kolleg, Göttingen's Institute for Advanced Studies, and Freigeist Fellow for the History of Ethics at the University of Göttingen. From 2022-2024, he worked as PASIFIC (MSC) Fellow on a project on early modern friendship. He is the author of *Pontano's Virtues. Aristotelian Moral and Political Thought in the Renaissance* (2017) and the co-editor of two recently published collected volumes, *Teaching Ethics in Early Modern Universities, 1500-1700* (2021), together with Valentina Lepri and Danilo Facca, and *Vera Amicitia. Classical Notions of Friendship in Renaissance Thought and Culture* (2022), with Patrizia Piredda. Matthias has also widely published on different aspects of early modern ethics and virtue theory, including pieces on animal ethics, Petrarca's moral self-fashioning, the virtue of magnificence, and the relationship between literature, collection history, and ethics, and early modern game culture.

## **Position**

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